

Raise a Glass!

Mess Hall Beverages Contribute to Marines' Performance

Beverage options available in military dining facilities are selected as a result of careful planning and a specific intent, which is to satisfy service members' expectations while fulfilling vital nutritional purposes.

Service members face demanding activity regimens, and often work in extreme climates, both of which require consuming greater quantities of calories and beverages to sustain critical physical

said. "Milk is also an excellent source of calcium and vitamin D."

Beverages are not only a source of nutrients, but also replenish minerals and salts that are important to regulating body functions, as well as maintaining physical and mental performance.

"Beverages also assist the body with replacing electrolytes," he said. "Replacing electrolytes is essential to keep your body hydrated, enhance performance, restore balance and help prevent muscle cramps. In addition, electrolytes play an important role in the body processes, which are essential for living."



A cold drink quenches the thirst of Marine Staff Sgt. Edward Fairley Jr.
(PHOTO BY: LANCE CPL. MANDALINE HATCH, USMC)

FUELED TO FIGHT

Nutritional and dietary educational programs used in military dining facilities that assist service members to identify and more often select meals to eat frequently, rather than those labeled as eat occasionally or rarely, are also being applied to beverages. "The Fueled to Fight program for the Marine Corps mess halls will label beverages accordingly to provide nutrition education at the beverage stations," Holladay said.

Future nutrition education guidelines being considered by the Marine Corps may further advise about quantities consumed rather than simply suggest between choices to be eaten frequently and rarely. "Yes, we will be considering nutrition education regarding optimal quantities to consume," Holladay said.

Since beverages available in mess halls are self-serve, the Fueled to Fight labels will identify the more healthful beverage varieties and advise service members to consider the frequency, as well as the quantity consumed.

Still, Higgins sees the advantage of giving service members the choice of a variety of beverage options, along with selection guidelines to influence choices. "Although sugary drinks are not the healthiest option, they provide choices and increase the variety of beverages that are provided in the mess halls," Higgins said. "In addition, there are no limitations on the beverages. It is up to each individual patron to consume sugary drinks moderately."

Flavored water expands the beverage assortment

and mental performance.

"Beverages are an important element in the mess halls because they provide nutrients as ancillary products as dictated by the Department of Defense Menu Standards stating, for example, that two or more 100 percent fruit juices will be served at breakfast," said Sharlene Holladay, warfighter performance dietitian, Headquarters Marine Corps.

Chief Warrant Officer Hunter Higgins, operations officer, 3rd Marine Logistics Group, Okinawa, Japan, explains that each variety of beverage options available in a Marine Corps dining facility contributes nutritional value that supports recovery from rigorous physical activity.

"Many 100 percent fruit and vegetable juices are also a good source of vitamin C, folate and potassium, while milk provides quality protein," Higgins

Smoothies add to the variety of drink available at the 12th Marines Mess Hall on Camp Hansen, Okinawa, Japan.
(PHOTO BY: LANCE CPL. MANDALINE HATCH, USMC)



in Marine Corps mess halls. “Flavored water beverages are low-/no-sugar drinks that provide a healthier alternative to beverages that are high in sugars (soft drinks, tea, etc.),” Higgins said.

All the familiar brand-name sodas, Gatorade, flavored water and other beverage options are available throughout the day in mess halls. “This allows for flexibility in accommodating the Marines that may work alternate shifts from a conventional schedule,” Holladay said.

Beverage options typically are centrally located in a dining facility with service members free to make any selection rather than influence the choice by making access easier to juices and water compared with sugary sodas.

“All beverages in Marine Corps mess halls are centrally located on one bar to maximize seating capacity,” Higgins said. “However, organization of the ‘order of flow’ is at the mess hall manager’s discretion.”

Holladay also considers it good for morale to have a choice of familiar brand-name sodas, Gatorade, flavored waters and other beverages in Marine Corps mess halls. “A variety of sodas are offered, as well as assorted flavors of Gatorade and flavored water, to demonstrate equally palatable options should the patron so choose,” she said.

DIETARY GOALS

Having a variety of beverages available in dining facilities ensures that service members are well hydrated and are fueled with essential nutrients, vitamins and minerals.

Guidelines driving menu development and beverage variety in dining facilities are the Military Dietary Reference Intakes (MDRIs), which are tailored to service members’ requirements. “These references drive select menu items in military feeding and are identical to recommended nutrient intakes cited in Dietary Guidelines for Americans (2010) and the Food and Nutrition Board’s updated Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs), except when there are known differences in the military population, Holladay said.

Recommended intakes of all essential vitamins and minerals are detailed in the MDRI. “Equal and distinct, each vitamin (and mineral) serves a purpose in performance and functionality in the body for our Marines to meet the mission,” she said.

Driven by these guidelines, more of the beverages found in Marine Corps mess halls are sources of vitamins and minerals or have reduced levels of sugar.

“Marine Corps Mess Halls are in compliance with the Department of Defense Menu Standards with regard to beverages,” Holladay said. “On average the following are offered within the mess halls: four juices, two waters, three Gatorades, one tea, two milks, and coffee, as compared to four sodas that meet the above stated criteria.”

Beverages offered in Marine Corps mess halls are based on the Department of Defense Menu Standards, which comprise: one percent milk fortified with vitamins A and D at every meal, plus low-fat chocolate and/or other flavored milk based on customer demand; lactose-free milk alternatives, including soy milk, based on customer demand; water dispenser available in beverage area; coffee and hot tea available at all meals; brewed, decaffeinated coffee and decaffeinated (hot) tea available at all meals on demand; iced tea sweetened and unsweetened based on demand; if soda is served, at least one low-calorie dark caffeinated soda and at least one low-calorie clear caffeine-free soda at every lunch and dinner meal; if soda is served, offer at least two caffeine-free sodas; two or more 100 percent fruit juice choices at breakfast, orange juice fortified with calcium and vitamin D and another juice high in vitamin C; and blended juices are acceptable, but must be 100 percent juice.

At Marine Corps Installations Pacific (MCIPAC), service members have many familiar choices. “The comfort beverages offered to the patrons in MCIPAC (Okinawa) Mess Halls are Pepsi, Mountain Dew, Ginger Ale, Lemon-Lime, Melon, Suntory Boss, Crush (orange soft drink) and tea,” Higgins said.

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FOOD FOCUS: BEVERAGES

Marine Corps Food Service and Subsistence Program MCO 10110.14M sets the standard MCIPAC (Okinawa) beverage menu: 1 percent white milk; 1 percent chocolate milk; 1/2 pint skim milk; individual tea bags; brewed coffee; individual decaffeinated coffee; four types of carbonated beverages, one will be diet soda and one will be un-cola; fruit juice; fruit-flavored drinks; sports drinks at the food service officer's discretion; and individual hot cocoa.

PLANNING BOARDS

Although the beverage selection is not determined by the service member's request, Higgins said, opinions are taken into consideration during the next menu planning board. Low-sugar beverages, for example, have joined the assortment during the past two years.

Still, having a variety of beverage choices available in dining facilities and mess halls is about meeting service member's expectations for familiar items and achieving high customer satisfaction.

"Marine input and satisfaction are always a con-

sideration coupled with nutrient requirements," Holaday said. "Periodically, food and beverage tastings are conducted to evaluate acceptability of new products."

Higgins constantly evaluates and adjusts the MCIPAC mess hall beverage assortment. "The products are chosen based on trial and error, and feedback from the Interactive Customer Evaluation (ICE)," he said. "ICE is a web-based tool that collects feedback on services provided by various organizations throughout the Department of Defense (DoD)."

There is no uniform method to measure service member's preferences. "Currently," he continued, "there is not an official surveying method that is used by mess hall managers or food service directors. However, the patrons are encouraged to utilize the ICE system to leave a satisfied or dissatisfied comment about the products or services. Based on the trial/error data, and the feedback from the ICE, food service officers and the mess hall managers will make the necessary adjustments and final determination."

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